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February 22, 2011



Julius Genachowski
Chairman
Federal Communication Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service Lifeline and Link Up

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

On behalf of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and its more than 400 member colleges and universities, we commend the Federal Communications Commission on its recent improvements to the long-underutilized Lifeline program, especially the launch of Safe Link Wireless in 2008.

A significant percentage of students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions come from families with low incomes who may qualify for the Lifeline program. According to the 2009 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, among the 2.1 million Hispanic young adults enrolled in postsecondary education, 48 percent are living at or near total poverty (24% are living on incomes near the poverty line; 24% have gross incomes that are below the poverty threshold.) Given the potential impact of proposed changes to the Lifeline program on individuals and families like these, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic, I am writing to express concern over these proposed changes.

As I am sure you know, the Lifeline program serves an important role in helping connect Latino families (among others) who have fallen under hardship and are unable to afford wireless communications through other means. While we applaud the Board's recommendations to adopt uniformity and minimize waste, fraud and abuse around the Lifeline program, HACU strongly urges the Commission to reconsider billing wireless Lifeline recipients either an upfront fee or a monthly fee to receive their Lifeline cell phone service. This neither encourages utilization nor does it combat fraud.

While the Lifeline program has seen unprecedented growth, it is still for all intents and purposes underutilized. Seventy-six percent (76%) of those eligible are not aware of or do not receive the Lifeline cell phone service. SafeLink alone has provided three million low-income households with a way to stay connected. LifeLine programs, like SafeLink, are effective for the very reason that the system does not require customer maintenance, nor does it require unnecessary depleting of already dismal economic resources of low-income families.

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities urges the commission to not alter the process of qualified Lifeline households to engage in a program that has served its purpose and has shown great success in helping low-income Latino families stay connected in these difficult economic times.

I would like to thank you for your attention to this important matter that affects so many Latino households across the United States.

Cordially,

Antonio R. Flores
President and CEO

cc: Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Robert McDowell
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Meredith Attwell Baker